

CBS EVENING NEWS

30 April 1984

CUBA/DRUG
SMUGGLING

RATHER: Nicaragua is often cited as a case in point of Cuba's self-appointed mission to export revolution. It's also alleged that Cuba is increasingly the middle man in exporting hard drugs for hard cash. Now new allegations that the drug running and gun running fuel each other, and both are getting outside help, help from a well-known American fugitive from justice. Rita Braver has been investigating this.

BRAVER: Federal investigators say that fugitive financier Robert Vesco and Cuban Premier Fidel Castro are partners, partners in an international drug smuggling operation now being probed in a series of federal cases. A grand jury in Tallahassee, Fla., has been investigating the Castro-Vesco link, and other investigations are underway in Brownsville, Texas, and New Orleans. Government sources believe that Vesco is now under Castro's protection in Cuba and is the master mind of system in which Colombia drug dealers use Cuban ports as safe harbor and get protection from Cuba in international waters in exchange for a cart of cocaine profits. Vesco is also alleged to be helping the Cubans spend their drug profits on illegal shipments from the U.S., some of the money going for high technology equipment to improve both Cuba's industrial production and intelligence gathering ability, other funds reportedly spent on arms shipments for left-wing guerrillas in Latin America. The government has long been aware of a U.S.-Cuban link. Cases in Florida and New York in the past few years have established the connection. Last year customs agents in Texas and Chicago seized sugar refining equipment Vesco was allegedly having smuggled out of the U.S. into Cuba. Federal investigators are uncertain of the extent of the Vesco-Cuban-U.S. connection, but a key Justice Department source has told CBS News that the government is now investigating Vesco's son, Daniel, who's believed to be in the United States, for allegedly laundering drug money through Panama. Rita Braver, CBS News, Washington.